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Practising Cultural Inclusivity During the Pandemic: A Case Study of an Online Composition Course in Canada

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Article abstract

The PhoeNX Ensemble-Memorial University composition course offers a case study of university-level pedagogical, intercultural music-making and its potential to engage the question of how music education can help to address existing racial and cultural tensions in society. During the course, racial and cultural concerns surfaced when participants negotiated their individual positionalities. An analysis of the multifaceted interactions demonstrates how this composition course exemplifies a meaningful and valuable path toward inclusive and anti-racist pedagogy in the Canadian classroom. Such approaches can address cultural misunderstanding and social injustice in the university context.

Practising Cultural Inclusivity During the Pandemic: A Case Study of an Online Composition Course in Canada

JING XIA

Abstract: The PhoeNX Ensemble-Memorial University composition course offers a case study of university-level pedagogical, intercultural music-making and its potential to engage the question of how music education can help to address existing racial and cultural tensions in society. During the course, racial and cultural concerns surfaced when participants negotiated their individual positionalities. An analysis of the multifaceted interactions demonstrates how this composition course exemplifies a meaningful and valuable path toward inclusive and anti-racist pedagogy in the Canadian classroom. Such approaches can address cultural misunderstanding and social injustice in the university context.

Résumé : Le cours de composition « Ensemble PhoeNX » de l'Université Memorial permet une étude de cas de production musicale pédagogique et interculturelle au niveau universitaire, qui a le potentiel d'aborder la question de la façon dont l'enseignement musical peut contribuer à traiter des tensions raciales et culturelles existant dans la société. Durant ce cours, des préoccupations raciales et culturelles sont apparues lorsque les participant.e.s ont négocié leur position individuelle. Une analyse de ces interactions complexes montre en quoi ce cours de composition constitue un exemple d'un cheminement significatif et appréciable vers une pédagogie inclusive et antiraciste dans une salle de classe au Canada. De telles approches peuvent répondre à l'incompréhension culturelle et à l'injustice sociale en contexte universitaire.

From Idle No More and Black Lives Matter to Truth and Reconciliation and the global COVID-19 pandemic, teaching and learning at post-secondary institutions in North America have been radically impacted by global and local events. When campuses were closed, university faculty members and

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students shifted abruptly to working or studying from home. For those who avoided interactions with technology, learning to engage with online methodologies and applications became necessary due to social distancing. While it no doubt created significant challenges, this systematic change in education also resulted in some positive outcomes (Urkevich 2020). Political economist Joseph Schumpeter (1942) describes this as "creative destruction": a process through which new innovative impulses dismantle existing/long-standing practices.

Andrew Staniland, a composer and music professor at Memorial University in Newfoundland and Labrador, sensed an opportunity to rethink the content of his composition seminar in early 2021 in response to global and local events. By inviting musicians from different cultural backgrounds and communities to work directly with the students online, Staniland created a dynamic virtual space for the course to proceed in a diverse cultural setting that implemented anti-racist pedagogy and remedied social injustice.

Employing autoethnographic (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011; Reed-Danahay 2017) and ethnographic methodologies (Graham 2009; Skinner 2012), I use this innovative course project as a case study to explore pedagogical intercultural music-making and its potential to engage with anti-racism within the context of university-level education. Unlike the term *multicultural*, which implies an attempt to disguise systemic political and economic disparities between unmarked "white" and racialized citizens (Kamboureli 2000; Coulthard 2014), and *transcultural*, associated primarily with highlighted cultural lines (Benessaieh 2010; Imbert 2010), *intercultural*, as I am using the term, emphasizes a fusion music culture with strong individual features created out of mutual influence and intertwined relationships among diverse musical traditions.

As a Chinese female musician and scholar in the course project, I kept an autoethnographic journal to record important activities along with my immediate emotional response. My ethnographic methodology included interviews, participant observation, and audio/visual documentation. The key question of my study was: *how can intercultural music education help combat racism in our society?* To answer this question, I begin with a detailed description of the course design and project structure, which set the stage for uncovering and negotiating cultural and racial concerns occurring in intercultural music-making. I then analyze my autoethnographic journal to illustrate how cultural inclusivity was achieved in the class, using the example of the collaboration between Andrew Luther (a composition student) and myself (a *zheng* player in this project). Drawing on Dylan Robinson's (2020) concept of "listening positionality," I examine the various positionalities of the participants in terms

of diverse racial backgrounds, musical goals, and cultural considerations. Finally, I illustrate how various cultural and racial issues were managed while musicians and students were completing musical works together. My analysis of this project will demonstrate that Staniland's online composition course effectively exemplifies anti-racist pedagogy by introducing minority music genres to the Western classroom as a way of dismantling cultural misunderstanding and nurturing intercultural appreciation.

The Global Context: COVID-19 and Anti-Asian Racism

This course took place at a time when world events exposed deep tensions between China and North America, resulting in a significant rise in anti-Asian racism. The "COVID-19 blame game" (Kumar and Nayar 2020) resulted in increasing violence and hate directed toward Asians. Many people blamed China for mishandling the initial outbreak and subsequent spread of the virus, and Donald Trump, then-US President (2017–2021), labelled COVID-19 a "Chinese virus" on Twitter on March 16, 2020 (@realDonaldTrump; the account was later banned and deleted by Twitter). Anti-Chinese/Asian sentiment grew on the internet and in real life, including the emergence of anti-Asian online hashtags and physical violence and harassment (Gover, Harper, and Langton 2020; Costello et al. 2021). Six Asian women were shot to death in Atlanta on March 16, 2021, and 1,151 incidents of anti-Asian crimes across Canada were reported by the *Fight Covid Racism* website as of March 6, 2022. Staniland was aware of these widespread social injustices and racial tensions and hoped to facilitate musical collaborations and creations that were not only artistically meaningful but also culturally significant. When his friend Sanya Eng shared her idea of initiating the PhoeNX Ensemble as a platform for East-West music exchange, Staniland conceived a project to connect the ensemble with his composition students. This project would not only fulfill his passion for music but also give the students an opportunity to gain access to and be inspired by Chinese instruments, which are absent from many curricula in Western universities, where Western classical music is the main focus (Hess 2015, 2017).

The Course and Project

Mixing group seminars and private lessons, the composition project provided advanced and intensive composition study for students whose major or minor was composition. It was a collaboration between Memorial University and the

PhoeNX Ensemble, an East-West fusion chamber ensemble based in Toronto. Seven undergraduate composition students at Memorial received training on writing new music for Chinese and Western instruments, pieces that were eventually performed by four musicians: Sanya Eng (harp), Ryan Scott (percussion), Patty Chan (*erhu*), and me (*zheng*). There were five major parts in the project: instrument workshops, music writing, audio/video recording, a performance assembly, and a listening party/project debrief.

In the first two weeks, musicians held workshops to introduce their instruments and playing techniques to the class. Each workshop highlighted a specific instrument, and the leading musician illustrated in detail the construction of the instrument, its pitch range, and different ways of playing it. Students were also exposed to representative composers in the field of East-West fusion music and listened to their musical works. Musicians and students had frequent dialogues about the information given in the workshops, and all participants actively engaged in the learning process. These workshops played a foundational role in creating a friendly and communicative atmosphere for the students and musicians from various racial and cultural backgrounds.

Communication during the workshops was multidirectional: the students had to incorporate new information about Chinese and Western instruments into the musical knowledge they already possessed. In this way, they were not only knowledge receivers but also innovators as they composed new music. At the same time, the musicians had to understand the students' knowledge system in order to arrange the workshops, and then continuously adjust the words they used to talk about their music and explore new playing possibilities as they received feedback and questions. Thus, the musicians became more musical partners than lecturers for the students; for example, students who had received Western music training were not familiar with the music systems of pentatonic instruments. Their understanding of the pentatonic music scale could only be built based on the diatonic knowledge system, which requires a subversion of what they may have considered "normal." Some students indicated that, despite their years of working in the music field in Canada, they had never formed personal impressions of Chinese music and culture until these workshops.

The second phase — music writing — was vital for the success of the project. By directly working with musicians, the students had gained new knowledge about writing music for Chinese and Western instruments and, more importantly, learned to appreciate underrepresented cultures through active research and class discussions. Many students found themselves going through a cultural and musical process of brainstorming in the two weeks of composing time. According to the three students that I interviewed, in addition to learning from the workshops, they did their own research on

Chinese instruments and listened to a lot of both Chinese music (traditional and contemporary) and fusion compositions in order to become familiar with the sounds and techniques. To compose fusion music, they also had to find connections between their assigned Western and Chinese instruments. As a result, the students widened their understanding of the interrelationships between different cultures, especially in the contemporary music field. This, of course, was not an easy process. In addition to racial and cultural issues that I will discuss in depth below, there were also technical challenges. For instance, student Andrew Luther explained that when he was writing music for zheng and percussion, he tried to follow his "routine" of listening to the playback on Finale, a music notation software, to get a sense of the overall effect. However, the zheng was not an option in the Finale sound bank. He ended up using the harp sound as a substitute for the zheng, which modeled a distinctly different sound than that in the final recording.

When the students and their partner musicians were satisfied with the revised scores, the musicians started to practise and finish the work of recording at home. The student composers decided whether to record an audio or video version of the music, and the musicians kept in close contact with them while practising and recording. When the COVID-19 pandemic brought this cross-provincial and intercultural course to life, it also challenged the participants in terms of technology restrictions and limited social interactions. For Luke Blackmore's composition, *Oscillations* for zheng and percussion, Ryan Scott, Blackmore, and I tried to set up a channel on SonoBus, an application for streaming low-latency peer-to-peer audio between devices over the internet. The result, however, was not ideal due to technical issues. Therefore, we had to practise and record our parts mainly with metronomes rather than through real-time online playing. As a team, the students and the musicians thus learned to pivot collectively.

The final showcase of the audio/video performances was meaningful to the participants, not only because of their musical achievements but also because of their deepened cultural appreciation. Staniland and the students assembled the audio and video files and made a playlist on SoundCloud, an online audio distribution platform and music-sharing website. Through its diverse range of musical sounds and ideas, this playlist presents the intricate musical exchanges that happened in this intercultural composition course. The following three sections demonstrate how participants managed the cultural and racial issues occurring in connection with their different racial and cultural backgrounds.

Cultural Negotiations

Staniland indicated in our interview that when he proposed this intercultural collaboration between students and musicians, he hoped to set an inclusive, meaningful, and celebratory atmosphere for the course. However, the process of achieving cultural inclusivity was not straightforward. As Peter Mittler (2000) notes, "Inclusion is based on a value system that welcomes and celebrates diversity arising from gender, nationality, race, language of origin, social background, level of educational achievement or disability" (10). Having had limited exposure to Chinese music, some of the students showed concern rather than celebration when they first saw the unfamiliar names of Chinese instruments on the syllabus. Students Andrew Luther and Luke Blackmore both indicated in our interviews that they were afraid of crossing the line into cultural appropriation. Luther recalled that, at first, he felt it was "scary" to write music for an unfamiliar instrument from another culture (interview, November 11, 2021). Blackmore said, "I avoided the traditional notation…. I didn't want to write for it [the zheng] as if I knew anything about it…. I wanted to leave a lot to the performer who knows more" (interview, November 9, 2021). As classically trained, young Western classical music composers, both Luther and Blackmore were cautious about what they wrote and tried to avoid musical elements that might be considered offensive to Chinese culture. The course was composed of a majority of white students, which corresponds with the demographic in many universities in North America (Hess 2017; Koza 2008). The presence of Chinese instruments made Eurocentricity in the university curricula sensible for the students and some of them were concerned about white supremacy in Canada. Luther sensed his privileged position as a white individual, even though he was a student in that project. When composing for zheng and percussion, Luther found it difficult to begin writing. From his perspective, the zheng was unique, different, and even a little dangerous to approach, especially during the pandemic, when racial conflicts intensified.

My position as a Chinese musician and scholar in a Western institution put me in the shifting roles of "insider" / "outsider" in this course. On the one hand, I was an insider who participated in every session of the course with my fellow collaborative musicians and students. On the other hand, I mindfully examined the project myself, and considered the experiences of the other musicians and students in order to see the "big picture." Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner (2011) define autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)." They argue that autoethnography is "both process and product" because of its close ties to

autobiography and ethnography (273). Along with participant observation and interviews, autoethnographic methodologies helped me negotiate the insider/outsider roles.

In my autoethnographic journal, I recorded my first impression of Luther's composition *Variations on Circular Motion* for percussion and zheng:

> I felt lost when I quickly went through the music that I just received from Andrew Luther…. Generally, this composition treats the zheng more like a "percussion instrument with bending effects" rather than a melodious instrument. The time signature changes in almost every measure, and the chords are written in an unconventional way. (February 21, 2021)

My autoethnographic journal helped me to review and balance my different roles, and it was an efficient way for me to record my cultural experience in the project. My reflection indicated that before communicating with Luther, I felt overwhelmed by the unconventional (mostly Western) musical ideas in his score. In my first email to Luther, I pointed out two chords that I could not play because of finger twists. Luther quickly fixed them and changed the two notes to be played on bare strings. After I tried the whole score on the zheng, I then found another big problem: it created additional and unwanted descending portamento in many spots where I had to quickly move my left hand after sliding a string. Without the experience of writing music for the zheng, Luther did not consider the lingering sound of a bending note in the initial composition. It took us several days of intensive communication to figure out a satisfactory version of the score.

The negotiations between Luther and me illustrated what Dylan Robinson (2020) calls "listening positionality." In his 2020 book *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies*, Robinson examines the ways that Indigenous music interacts with Western classical music and advocates for a critical awareness of "listening positionality," through which we are called to examine our "listening privilege, listening biases, and listening ability that are never wholly positive or negative" (10). He emphasizes the intersections and influences of "race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and cultural background" at work in the listening process. Although Robinson's focus is decolonization, the idea of listening positionality is also a useful way to understand our divergent interpretations of intercultural music.

Coming from different cultural and racial backgrounds, Luther and I were managing our initial cultural uneasiness, which was mainly led by our different listening positionalities. Luther's Western musical training and my

Chinese zheng education clashed in the realm of our newly formed partnership. Both of us were learning to accept new knowledge and be open-minded about changes. Luther tried to avoid the traditional features of the zheng, and I constantly adjusted my playing habits to meet his musical requirements. Drawing on Mary Louise Pratt's (2008) notion of the contact zone, wherein "disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (7), Robinson further understands listening as a "haptic and proprioceptive encounter with affectively experienced asymmetries of power" (11). There were also intricate power relationships between Luther and I when we worked on the piece together: he was a student from the dominant culture, and I was an expert performer with a potentially "othered" racial background. As a white student, Luther wrote unconventional zheng music as a way of showing his respect for Chinese culture and avoiding cultural appropriation. Without understanding Luther's good intentions, however, my first impression of the music was a little worrisome, even though I was excited to embrace new musical possibilities. We had distinct listening experiences with Luther's music, which presented our individual and cultural standpoints.

By inviting Chinese and Western musicians to introduce their instruments and participate in the intercultural music-making process, this course exposed implicit cultural barriers that exist and persist in our society due to a lack of intercultural communication. The course offered us a safe space to exchange cultural concerns and opinions, and our negotiations played an important role in dismantling cultural misunderstandings that we might not have been able to address in other contexts. After several revisions, Luther's nervousness gradually turned into excitement, and I also became more open-minded and enjoyed playing the unconventional piece.

Racial Navigations

In the context of a pandemic, this course acted as a kaleidoscope that reflected the larger multicultural Canadian society where people hold different perspectives and ideas with regard to cultural and racial issues. According to George J. Sefa Dei (2001),

> Anti-racism education is about expanding our knowledge base in order to give us a more accurate understanding of social worlds. It is a discursive practice to place us within the realities of local, national, global, and transnational diversity in order to render all

> of us spiritual beings through an anti-oppressive frame of reference. (149–50)

This course practised anti-racism education by inviting into the class Chinese and Western instruments as representing equally important music cultures — students learned and composed music for paired instruments, and they worked directly with musicians from both cultural backgrounds. This pedagogy allowed the participants to discover racial and cultural issues existing in Canadian society and helped them better understand their social world.

Sanya Eng and Patty Chan had the initial idea to establish the PhoeNX Ensemble in 2019 when they played together in performances of *The Monkiest King* along with the Canadian Children's Opera Company. As a third-generation Chinese Canadian, Eng had never been exposed to Chinese instrumentation until that project. She was amazed by Chan's erhu playing. With their Asian appearance, both Eng and Chan had experienced racial discrimination while growing up in Toronto: throughout her schooling, Chan was always put in the English as a Second Language (ESL) class before she said a word to the teacher; Eng encountered physical bullying and name-calling in school and other places. However, even though they have certain ties to Chinese culture due to their family histories, neither of them speaks fluent Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese) and their lifestyles are strongly Western. They are what some people call "bananas" — yellow on the outside but white on the inside. Their similar life experiences brought Eng and Chan together, and they decided to form a musical group as a way of what Eng calls "offering back" to a society where racism exists due to a lack of information and communication (interview, November 8, 2021). As Augie Fleras (2014) states: "Racism is widely perceived as a by-product of ignorance of the unknown because of improper socialization. Improving people's knowledge about or sensitivity to diversity will gradually diminish the spectre of racism" (218).

As described on its website, the PhoeNX Ensemble aims to "explore, promote, and expand the East/West mixed-musical medium through performances, educational workshops, commissioning, and cross-disciplinary collaborations." In this vein, Staniland's composition course offered Eng and Chan the opportunity to share their lifelong diasporic experiences of living between Chinese and Western cultures in Canada with the students. They also connected to their roots in Chinese culture while taking part in intercultural collaborations. For example, both Eng and Chan indicated that they gained knowledge of the Chinese Mid-Autumn Moon Festival and its legends during their inaugural digital online premiere using student Grace Lizan's composition *Fire*. The fusion music composed in this course delicately showcases the

condition of "cultural in-betweenness," or "the spectre of 'and'" (Ibrahim 2008) that Chan and many Chinese Canadians face in the diaspora. In our interview, Chan said,

> The local-born Chinese have been here for many generations. They will feel very far from their roots. If they do not connect with their roots, they could also reject their roots, which I have seen so many Chinese do…. They reject it because it makes them different or it makes them feel different, which I think is sad. But at the same time, speaking as a person who grew up here and wants to know more about Chinese roots, I have also been rejected by the Chinese. (interview, November 6, 2021)

Chinese Canadians are attached to both Chinese and Western cultures, but neither community fully embraces them and treats them equally. In his book *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha (2004) introduces a theory of international culture that is "based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity" (56). Chan and Eng have utilized music to boldly express such international cultural hybridity in Canada. Their East-West fusion music represents who they are and what they have been through. Chan considers herself a "cultural connector" and has a passion for "sharing the beauty of [Chinese] music to a new generation and audience and building bridges between cultures."

This goal, however, is not easy to achieve. Deborah Wong (2006) has identified the multiple challenges that Asian American musicians have faced. She writes:

> Any Asian American musician focused on the production of an Asian American music must decide how to line up intent, musical sounds, and reception. Orientalist reinterpretation is the omnipresent problem. One way to create sounds that signal Asian Americanness is to insert Asian instruments into non-Asian musical practice. This is sometimes "effective" in the sense that it offers unmistakable visual and sonic signals to audiences, but it also sets up the possibility of hearing/seeing Asian Americans as permanently foreign. (5)

In the Canadian context, such orientalist reinterpretation is further complicated due to the widely promoted "mosaic" multiculturalism that amplifies cultural differences (Sielke 2014). With these challenges in mind, the PhoeNX Ensemble

has used East-West hybridity to present new music. With most of her musical education rooted in Western culture, Eng believes that there is a void between Chinese and Western cultures, and the best way to fill it is through pairing instruments from each culture. Not only is it easier for musicians and audiences to engage when they can recognize certain musical elements in the hybridity, but also the unfamiliar parts offer a wide space for musical innovation. Given these values, this course offered a great platform for the PhoeNX Ensemble to promote their East-West intercultural belief.

When the PhoeNX Ensemble's belief was introduced to the class, the composition students also discovered the intercultural and interracial space that inconspicuously exists in Canadian multicultural society. By conducting active research and negotiating with the musicians, the students gained knowledge about Chinese and Western cultures as well as a deeper understanding of the people with ties to these cultures.

Sense of Pride

While Blackmore and Luther were concerned about cultural issues, another student gained a sense of pride by participating in this intercultural course. Grace Lizan is Chinese Canadian and was adopted by her Canadian parents when she was an infant. Like Eng and Chan, Lizan grew up facing "unconscious bias" and overt discrimination in Newfoundland. In this easternmost and isolated province, there is only a small Chinese community, and the population ratio has made the Chinese residents' minority status even more "visible." As Lizan said, she is tired of explaining to people why her English is so good, and sometimes she purposely feigns a Filipino accent that she learned from her coworkers in order to avoid people's questioning (interview, November 10, 2021). At certain moments, she has even considered moving to British Columbia, where there is a greater population of people of Chinese descent.

Some white adoptive parents may be concerned about "Chineseness" representing too much difference (Dorow 2006), but Lizan's family tried to acknowledge her cultural and, to some degree, racial difference. They sent Lizan to learn Chinese when she was little, and they celebrate Chinese New Year with a group of adoptive families every year. Despite their best intentions, however, Lizan could not gain a comprehensive understanding of Chinese culture while growing up in Newfoundland for several reasons. For example, as Andrea Louie (2015) observes, "White adoptive parents produce Chineseness within a context that reflects the worldviews in which they have been raised" (188). Even though

Lizan wants to connect with her Chinese cultural roots, she believes her current mindset and lifestyle are more "Canadian" than "Chinese."

To understand the complex meanings circulating around Lizan's relationships to Chineseness and whiteness, it is important to examine the broader multicultural context where culture and race are intricately constructed. The emergence of multiculturalism in Canada was primarily based on the "assumption that national unity and social cohesion can be molded by integrating differences into a societal framework — not denying them" (Fléras and Elliott 1992: 2). Many studies, however, suggest that multiculturalism dangerously distracts from power relations under the guise of a celebratory focus on cultural differences (Anagnost 2000; Attariwala 2013; Omi and Winant 1994). While growing up in Canada, Lizan was more troubled by her Asian appearance than she was in benefiting from her racial difference.

When Staniland introduced the innovative East-West collaborations to the class, Lizan found a unique opportunity to explore Chinese culture and more importantly compose fusion music that represents her life. As Lizan said, she "finally had a chance to develop the other side of [her]." She named her composition for zheng and harp *Fire*, which, according to Lizan, "paints a picture of a relentless burst of energy consuming everything in its path." The fire-like energy is in Lizan, and she is ready to face and overcome any obstacles in her life. Just like Eng, Chan, and many other Chinese Canadian musicians, Lizan has dealt with her in-between cultural situation in Western society by utilizing music as a powerful tool to respond to the discrimination she has encountered. This course made her goals tangible and achievable when her music was presented online to a wide audience.

The course also happened at a time when Lizan had "pandemic anxiety." Despite Newfoundland's reputation for being a friendly place, some local Chinese residents reported to CBC their encounters with anti-Asian racism during the pandemic. Racism has always been real to Lizan, and the situation was getting worse when the COVID-19 crisis drew attention to ongoing (but sometimes camouflaged) racial issues. Examining hate crimes in America, Hannah Tessler, Meera Choi, and Grace Kao (2020) indicate that hatred toward Asians has "historical roots that have placed Asians outside the boundaries of whiteness and American citizenship" (638). Both Canada and the US have a shameful history of excluding Chinese immigrants in the early decades of the twentieth century, and people of Asian descent here are "perpetual foreigners" regardless of their immigrant or generational status (Ancheta 2006; Tuan 1998; Saito 1997). The award-winning film producer Janet Yang comments:

> I have seen this incredible seesaw effect. We can go back to the turn of the century, when Chinese were the only people to be legally excluded from this country because people were so fearful of the jobs they were taking. That was seemingly a place that we would never go to anymore, that level of vitriol. We've seen it, though, in waves since then: World War II, we had an Asian enemy; Korean War, we had an Asian enemy; Vietnam War, we had an Asian enemy. And then we had Asian enemies that were economic in nature. (Scheer 2020)

For people of Chinese descent in North America, the feeling of being "perpetual foreigners" can remain for a lifetime. Many Canadians may be unwilling to acknowledge racism-based disparities in the context of a celebratory multicultural national atmosphere (Feagin 2006), but as Augie Fleras (2014) counters, "whether we like it or not, approve or disapprove, racisms in Canada exist, and their existence is characterized by a myriad of sources, forms, expressions, and impacts" (205). Lizan was cautious about her difference from a young age, and she was concerned about being targeted for such hate crimes when the pandemic dramatically exposed and intensified racial tensions. Unlike her white peers, who were eager to go out during the lockdowns, Lizan tried to stay at home, where she felt safer and more at peace.

When she realized the course featured Chinese instruments, Grace saw a light that eventually guided her to walk out of her pandemic anxiety. She felt proud that Chinese instruments, as a niche genre in North America, came to her classroom and were introduced by her Western teacher and learned by her Western classmates. Even though it was just one course for several months, the sense of pride significantly mitigated her long-time unease at being an adopted Chinese person in Newfoundland.

Conclusion

Cultural inclusivity has gained steady international prominence since the United Nations' first Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In Canada, however, multiculturalism complicates the dynamic cultural environment that is supposed to be inclusivity-driven. Emphasized cultural difference both values equality and reinforces racial and cultural stereotypes. Such paradoxical inclusiveness has put many people like Chan, Eng, and Lizan in a liminal situation in which they feel they do not belong to any of the conventionally

defined communities. They are representative of many in Canada, but their stories are rarely heard by the public.

Veugelers and Leeman (2020) write that "education has a central role in creating possibilities for both inclusion and for segregation" (56). Only with a deep understanding of racial and cultural complexity can education become an efficient tool for practising cultural inclusivity. As Sefa Dei (2001) claims:

> If the student of the dominant group or a minority student has to sit through an education which renders them invisible, then that is sufficiently unjust and needs to be redressed. Pedagogical practices must reflect the diverse bodies, histories and experiences of the today's classrooms. (149)

In multicultural Canada, there is great racial and cultural diversity in many classrooms, but students' diverse experiences and concerns are not always well addressed. Students need to be educated about the intricacies of multicultural societies in order to acclimate themselves to a more pluralistic and diverse future (McPherson and Welch 2012; Vertovec 2007). In the PhoeNX Ensemble-Memorial University composition course, participants were able to express their distinct life experiences musically. If one listens to the final playlist carefully, one hears that the music is intercultural rather than multicultural, and it presents multilayered stories. The compositions written by Luther and Blackmore are more experimental and unconventional than Lizan's. As white students with Western musical training backgrounds, Luther and Blackmore tried to limit the cultural imprint of the Chinese instruments by employing more dissonant intervals, rhythmic variations, and new playing techniques. In contrast, Lizan's piece, *Fire*, sounds more "Chinese" due to the pentatonic melodies and harmonious chord progression. The fast, fire-like rhythm shows Lizan's desire to connect with her Chinese cultural roots and fight against racism and cultural inequality in society. With mixed Asian/Western appearances, instrumentations, and sounds, their music videos also subtly present the intricate racial and cultural relationships in the classroom.

Music has been a powerful tool for building community and facilitating social cohesion regardless of participants' cultural and language backgrounds, and I believe that music departments can play a leading role in facilitating cultural inclusivity and eradicating barriers of race in the context of university-level education. Current music curricula in many Canadian universities, however, rarely satisfy students who show interest in music outside of the Western tradition. Charles Carson and Maria Westvall (2016) describe the

common situation in programs where virtually all performance opportunities are in Western music:

> The exception being the "world music" ensembles administered by the division of musicology/ethnomusicology. These ensembles are generally "bracketed off" from the rest of the school of music's activities: music majors are unable to participate in these ensembles as a part of their curriculum. Thus, the ensembles are comprised mostly of nonmajors, a few members from the community, and graduate students from the ethnomusicology program, for whom participation in such groups is mandatory. For the most part, the marginalization of non-western musics in the curriculum is mirrored in the marginalization of these groups. (44)

In addition, "scholars of color are significantly underrepresented in faculty positions within the higher education system as a whole" (Chivers and Smyth 2011: 190). These facts show how power circulates through music institutions, and I therefore agree with Loren Kajikawa (2019) that "music departments can have a role to play in remedying past injustices and creating a more just and equitable future" (167).

The PhoeNX Ensemble-Memorial University composition course is a good example of how a music course can creatively meet this challenge, and it demonstrates what can happen in a department that makes the effort to create a more equitable educational environment. After all, "the only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it — and then dismantle it" (Kendi 2019: 12). Kyoko Kishimoto (2018) strongly advocates that "faculty need to be aware of their social position, but more importantly, to begin and continue critical self-reflection in order to effectively implement anti-racist pedagogy" (540–41). As the course instructor, Staniland's effort to challenge Eurocentrism has played an important role in incorporating anti-racist pedagogy into the course. In this course, racial and cultural concerns gradually surfaced while participants communicated their ideas and opinions, and the discovered issues were continuously managed through their collective music-making. Luther was able to compose for instruments from a non-Western culture without letting the cultural issues hinder him; I gained a better understanding of Western composers' intentions when writing unconventional music and became more open to such innovations; Eng and Chan were content that they were "offering back" to make a more tolerant and just society; and Lizan conquered her pandemic anxiety, gained a sense of pride, and became more confident to pursue her music career in Canada. Instead of including individuals from

marginalized or liminal communities to develop skills catering to the dominant group's values, this composition course helped participants cultivate a more nuanced view of multicultural society by emphasizing individual characteristics. By inviting Chinese musicians to work directly with the composition students, it participated not in simple "musical tourism" (Campbell 2002) at a superficial level but instead in a deeper and more intricate intercultural exchange. With its rich content and outcome, I believe this course exemplifies a meaningful and valuable path, employing inclusive and anti-racist pedagogy in a Canadian classroom and remedying cultural misunderstanding and social injustice in the university context.

Notes

1. In my use of the term, *intercultural* has a more positive sense than it does for Dylan Robinson (2020), for whom so-called intercultural collaboration is too often an excuse for appropriating Indigenous music. He proposes the term *inclusionary* as more apt when describing so-called intercultural contemporary art music projects by composers in North America that include elements of Indigenous music (such as recorded samples or even live performers). He uses the term *Indigenous+art music* for resurgent projects that foreground Indigenous sovereignty and remind listeners of the distinctive and contrasting ontologies of music from Indigenous and Western perspectives. Robinson's suspicion of the term *intercultural* is a useful reminder of the power dynamics present in such collaborations.

2. The zheng, or guzheng, is a Chinese plucked zither with more than 2,500 years of history. The modern standard zheng has twenty-one strings and is tuned in a major pentatonic scale.

3. See the news report about the Atlanta shooting from the New York Times at https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/03/17/us/shooting-atlanta-acworth. Fight Covid Racism is a website dedicated to tracking and reporting anti-Asian racism and xenophobia in Canada. It was collaboratively established by four organizations: the Toronto chapter of the Chinese Canadian National Council; the Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice; the Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic; and the Civic Engagement Network Society of Canada. See https://www.covidracism.ca/about.

4. See https://phoenxensemble.com.

5. The erhu is a two-stringed bowed instrument that was introduced to China before the tenth century (Lau 2008).

6. The students had given their explicit permissions to be identified by name in the interviews.

7. See https://phoenxensemble.com/.

8. See http://www.torontochineseorchestra.com/wp/teammembers/patty-chan/.

9. The 2016 Canada Census showed that there were 2,700 residents of Chinese ethnic origins in Newfoundland and Labrador, occupying 0.5 percent of its total population of 519,716. See https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=POPC&Code1=0792&Geo2=PR&Code2=10&Data=Count&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All.

10. This concept is controversial in some areas of Canada. For example, a 2019 Quebec law (Bill 21) banned religious symbols and prevented a person whose face is covered from delivering or receiving a public service. A Canadian court struck down part of this disputed law on April 20, 2021. See https://nationalpost.com/pmn/news-pmn/crime-pmn/canada-court-strikes-down-part-of-controversial-quebec-law-on-religious-symbols.

11. See her program notes for the PhoeNX Ensemble's inaugural digital online premiere at https://ne-np.facebook.com/107488991678151/photos/a.107520335008350/122659596827757/.

12. More information about anti-Chinese racism during the pandemic in Newfoundland, please see the CBC news on September 7, 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/racism-mundy-pond-st-johns-1.5714808.

13. Many indentured Chinese laborers were hired to build the cross-country railway systems in Canada and the United States beginning in the nineteenth century. After these railways were completed at the end of the nineteenth century, Canada and the United States implemented a series of unjust policies to block Chinese immigration, which included a head tax for Chinese immigrants (1885–1923) in Canada and the Chinese Exclusion Act in the United States (1882–1943) (Wu 1986).

14. See https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

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